

*'To prepare God's people for works of service'*

## WITNESSING TO THE WITNESSES



### Study No. 2

## OUR GOD HAS REVEALED HIMSELF!

- Translating God's name as 'Jehovah'
- The meaning of the name 'Jehovah'

## JW BELIEFS ABOUT GOD AND CHRIST

- How do they comprehend Jehovah God?
- Just who is 'Jesus' for the Witnesses?

*"In your hearts set apart Christ as Lord. Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect."*

1 Peter 3:15,16

# 1. Our God has revealed himself!

## a) Translating God's name as 'Jehovah'

In the Old Testament God is referred to in various ways: God, God Most High, Mighty God, the Lord, the LORD, etc.

The use of the form 'LORD' represents God's personal name. The Hebrew text behind 'LORD' uses four consonants YHWH, referred to by the theologians as the 'tetragrammaton'.

A tradition grew up that this name was too sacred to pronounce publically, so it got replaced when reading by another Hebrew title meaning 'My Lord'. Later these two elements were combined – the vowels from 'My Lord' with the consonants YHWH producing the form Yahweh or Jehovah.

Some English translations of the OT have used Jehovah or Yahweh instead of LORD: 'Jehovah' occurs in the AV four times; in the ASV throughout; in J.N. Darby's version throughout and in the JWs' New World Translation throughout. The JB uses 'Yahweh' all the time.

## b) The meaning of the personal name 'Jehovah'

God explains his name to Moses three times in Exodus – in chapters 3, 6 & 34.

**In Exodus 3:13-15** 'The LORD' (Jehovah) is equated to 'I AM' (the verb 'to be').

God is saying 'I AM' – 'I exist; I am here, ever present'  
– 'I am knowable, able to intervene'.

'I AM' – 'Independent of my creation'  
– 'Sovereign in all that I do'

'I AM WHO I AM' – 'Embodying resources for every contingency'  
– 'Myself, totally sufficient for all things'

**In Exodus 6:2-8** The LORD, Jehovah, reveals himself in redemptive power. He promises release to those enslaved. But more than that: he will take them as his people and will be their God.

**In Exodus 34:4-7** God stands alongside Moses, unfolding his gracious heart toward his chosen people, yet still emphasising his righteous and just requirements.

## 2. JW Beliefs about God and Christ

### a) Their understanding of Jehovah's person

For JWs Jehovah is the only one true God. Before he began to create he was (they teach) all alone beyond space and time. As we noted earlier Jehovah is the name used for God throughout the Old Testament of their NWT Bible. However, quite unjustifiably, they have introduced the name 'Jehovah' 237 times in the pages of the New Testament although there is no Greek manuscript support whatsoever.

What about the Watchtower understanding of the character of God?

They speak of four attributes of Jehovah: justice, power, love and wisdom. It has been claimed by some that JWs minimise the love of God. Certainly they make a strong contrast between God's love and any action that might result in torment:

- they deny any purgatorial torment that might purify the sinner;
- they also deny any eternal torment that would punish the unbeliever.

Witnesses do lay great emphasis on the ultimate vindication of Jehovah and his purposes in human affairs. History, they affirm, is moving to a climax when Jehovah will finally demonstrate his supreme power.

Both through their literature and in personal conversation with JWs, there seems to be little awareness of the compassionate heart of God as Moses understood it in Exodus 34 or as Jesus shares with the disciples in John's gospel.

### b) Just who is 'Jesus' for the JWs?

Watchtower folk affirm (naturally!) that Jesus is all that scripture says he is: Son of God, Son of Man, Christ/Messiah, Saviour, Lamb of God, Mediator, etc. However, there is a problem ...

... JW understanding of many of Jesus' titles bears a **restricted meaning** from what God's word intends us to understand – for example 'Son of God'. In this way the movement distances itself from the historic Christian faith.

From the way the NT brings together the Lord Jesus with God the Father and with the person of the Holy Spirit it reveals a union which is inseparable, three persons and yet one God. The Witnesses, of course, like to emphasise that the word 'trinity' does not occur in the text of

scripture. Whilst this is true, the meaning behind the term is woven into the very fabric of the gospels and the epistles.

The Witnesses do have a number of proof texts to which they appeal so as to 'prove' that Jesus, the Christ, is not himself God. Here are several:

John 14:28 "My Father is greater than I."

1 Corinthians 11:3 "... and the head of Christ is God."

Mark 10:18 "Jesus said ... 'Why do you call me good? There is only one who is good, that is God.'"

It is a worthwhile exercise to explore the context of such quotations as these to see why is it not acceptable to draw the Watchtower conclusions from them.

We now consider **JW teaching about Christ** under three headings:

**The pre-human Christ.** Watchtower doctrine says ...

- He was the first creature formed by Jehovah.
- Yes, he is 'the Son of God' but not 'God the Son'.
- Before birth as a child he was known as Michael, chief of angels.
- Initially he did not possess immortality. This was granted later.

**Christ's human state.** JWs affirm ...

- Jesus' birth was not an incarnation. In the virgin birth (they say) the 'personality' or 'life pattern' of the Son was imparted to the child Jesus.
- Christ was born as a 'perfect human creature'. This was necessary so that in dying he could undo the harm brought to humanity by Adam.

**The post-resurrection Christ.** The Witnesses' teaching is that ...

- Jehovah raised Christ from death. However, "not as a human Son but as a mighty, immortal, spirit Son".
- Implicit in this is a denial of the bodily resurrection of Christ.
- If we ask JWs 'What happened to the body of Christ?' we are told that 'Jehovah God disposed of that body in his own way, just as he had disposed of Moses' body ... but no one knows how.'

As we look at this teaching it does appear that the movement has three Christs with little coherence or continuity between them. None is equal to Jehovah and none of them embodies at all the true Christ that scripture so wonderfully reveals to us.